2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

beauty in their wiry branches and finely serrated leaves. In their shade the grasses grew tall and vivid, while around were masses of small yellow flowers which resembled the wild marguerite.

We had gone only a few miles when the station wagon broke down, necessitating a stop for repairs. While the engineer poked his head under the bonnet, I took a stroll in the valley and climbed the high sandbanks in order to observe the vegetation more closely. To my surprise, I found several varieties of flowers common to the English countryside growing in profusion in this wilderness. According to the notes I made at the time there were white campions, vetch, broom (the flowers were smaller than ours and lacking in perfume), sorrel, dandelion, convolvulus, a small yellow flower which resembled 'Old Lady's Slipper', and camel-grass; the last-named having a segmented stalk and spear-like leaves not unlike bamboo, of which it may be a distant relative. This grass grew to a height of nearly four feet.

There were also clumps of *ashgar*, the rubbery-leaved bush which exudes a highly-poisonous sap, and whose dark purple flowers have a passionate, poppy-like beauty. The sandy ground was full of burrows made by rock lizards, rabbits and desert rats, though I saw none of these animals on this stage of the journey. Locusts and grasshoppers were plentiful, and I saw several Red Admiral, Tortoiseshell and Comma butterflies, also a large black ant marked with white spots, with elongated legs which raised its body an eighth of an inch above the ground.

The engine repaired, we drove on for another twenty miles, until the granite ridges of Ruus-al-Jibal came into sight. This range of hills, which stretches from the northernmost tip of the peninsula to as far south as Muscat, varies in height from 2,000 to 8,000 feet. Commanders of aircraft using this route have assured me, however, that the latter figure is an error, and that the maps are incorrectly marked. The mountains looked blue in the distance, as all mountains do, but as we approached them the dark patches became honey-coloured cliffs, and the light sweeps turned into ridges and plateaux of variegated strata. As mountains go, they are not beautiful in the æsthetic Alpine sense, yet there is a certain grandeur about their irregular peaks and the ragged angles of the cliffs. The violet and pink slopes were most soothing to our desert-tired eyes.

In an unexpected dip in the valley we came upon a herd of camels grazing on the tender thorn leaves; there were about six calves

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

233 amongst them and, at the approach of our cars, they reared in terror and loped awkwardly towards a defensive buttress of rock. One supercilious parent stood his ground, eyeing us with a bilious look in which both reproach and indignation were combined; he thrust out a pendulous lip and roared like a miniature lion. Further on we met the owners of the herd, a group of Bedouin Arabs, who were squatting on the sand, eating dates and chipatties. Mauser rifles, embellished with silver bands, were slung over their shoulders and, although they looked fierce enough to cut our throats at the slightest provocation, they cheerfully answered the '*Subbuk ala'l bukhair*' with which the Khan Sahib greeted them.

We were about twenty miles from our objective, the little seaport of Mahrid (which is separated from the town of Ras-al-Khaimah by a wide creek), when the station wagon again broke down and had to be finally abandoned. The engineer, who informed us that a defective petrol pump was the cause of the trouble, volunteered to remain behind with the driver until we returned with a tow rope. The road became worse as we set forth again, the steering wheel frequently being wrenched out of the coxswain's hands as the truck was flung down sharp escarpments or rolled down soft banks of deep sand. When we reached a small village, unnamed on the map, the habitations of which consisted of rude barousti huts, the track disappeared in a clump of neam trees and we narrowly escaped falling into a newly-dug well.

The villagers clustered around our car and successfully misdirected us on to a road leading in the opposite direction to that which we desired to take. Fortunately a mud wall and a dead camel barred our progress and we stopped the truck, while the Khan Sahib and myself reconnoitred the environs of the village to get our bearings. When one is lost in a patch of desert it is no easy matter to retrieve one's position on the map. We decided that
136 our road lay to the left, and returned to the car and the dead camel,
825 over which hovered, in vicious anticipation, a flock of scrofulous vultures and hawks.

These revolting creatures are venerated by the Arabs, as they are very efficient scavengers and in a few days will pick a carcase clean, so that in a short time one returns to find nothing left but a perfect skeleton or sun-bleached bones scattered over the desert. It is a serious offence to shoot a vulture, which the Arabs call *nasir*. They never attack a living creature, as the eagle will do, but hover above it

must have got to loathe those rattling ovens, the desert battle-wagons!

None of us felt like walking the ten miles to Ral-al-Khaimah. We decided to invite the Khan Sahib to give us his advice. He at least knew the locality; but to our surprise he had disappeared. We assumed he had designs of his own, and waited patiently in the shade of an old palm tree until he should return. On our left the creek flowed lazily as the tide came in, while to our right lay open fields of clover, divided by plantations of thriving date palms, each about a quarter of an acre in extent, and surrounded by flint-and-mortar walls three feet high. The trees are carefully tended from the first planting, and the plantations contain as many as twenty to thirty deep wells each, from which the water is hand-drawn by means of buckets attached to long ropes.

On some plantations there is a simple, but effective, irrigation system; this consists of channels running at right angles, like the lines on a crossword puzzle. The young plants are placed in the ground between these channels, and are surrounded by low mud walls. This enables the water to collect around the roots in a saucer-shaped depression. The roots penetrate the soil for five or six feet in their search for water, and trees in their prime (about twenty years old) reach a height of thirty feet or more. The bark is composed of the stem-base of the leaves or fronds, which die off each summer. The fruit begins to form in July and the dates are ready for picking in September. They are then packed tightly in boxes and taken by camel or dhow to the merchants for export. Those intended for local consumption are either dried, or else pickled in their own syrup, to which is sometimes added wild honey and ginger, making a delicious concoction.

Herds of cattle were grazing in the fields, watched by young Arab boys; they sang ditties to each other or told stories, a favourite desert pastime. The cattle are very small and anæmic compared with European stock, the largest bull being no larger than a young English heifer. Like the Indian cattle, from which no doubt they are descended, they are hump-backed and have a pathetic *moo-oo* which resembles the cry of a nursery toy cow. The Arab farmers tie the forefeet of their cattle together to prevent them from straying, and their progress when being driven reminded me of a two-legged race.

We had brought a .303 service rifle with us. It had originally belonged to one of our Askhari guards, but he had not looked after

[* Ten miles from Ras-al-Khaimah -- Analyst]

travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs. Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu* might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal, camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys, wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco, which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.

30: Gt. Britain G-5 (ca. 1918) 1920 MJ1 Saudi Arabia
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and Ghāfiri political factions (see Chap. VIII, p. 240), the former being Sunnis of the Maliki sect, the latter virtually Wahabis, though not of the militant order. Modern rifles are widely distributed both in town and country, but the traffic in arms has now been virtually suspended (cf. p. 247).

Industries and Trade

The most important industry is pearl-diving, which in summer employs most of the able-bodied men with more than 1,200 boats; though during the winter some of the divers take part in the ordinary fisheries (the second great industry of the coast), the majority take their ease, retained by the pearl-boat owners and contractors, by whom they are supported through the slack season. Agriculture employs the settled population of the interior; vegetables are raised by irrigation from wells in most places, and dates are also grown, though they seldom fully ripen S. of Ras el-Kheimah. Cereals only succeed in a few favoured spots such as *Sīr* in the Shameilīyah district. The live stock of the villages consists of camels, donkeys, cattle, sheep, and goats; horses are rare. The Bedouins subsist chiefly by their herds. In winter, when there is pasture, they roam far and wide; in the hot weather they gather about the more abundant wells, such as those of the *Jiri* plain in the N., and *Beinūnah* in the W.

Pearls are the most valuable export, and are sent almost entirely to India from the port of Dibai. The oyster-shells from which the pearls are taken come next in importance; it is questioned whether the practice of selling these, instead of at once returning them to the sea, may not in the long run tend to exhaust the pearl-banks. Dried fish are exported from Abu Dhabi.

The imports in order of their value are: grain and pulse, from India and Persia; cotton piece-goods from India; dates and date-juice from 'Irāq; coffee, chiefly from India; sugar, from or through India, and miscellaneous provisions from Persia. The only steamship port is Dibai, but the other coastal towns are used by native sea-going boats running to and from India, Persia, and 'Irāq. Inland trade with the Bedouins is of no great volume, but Trucial Oman shares that of the Bireimi oasis with the Sultanate. The coast between Ras Musandam and Abu Dhabi was formerly used as a base by smugglers of arms, bringing rifles and ammunition from Sohār through Bireimi, and loading for Persia and El-Qatar either at the coastal towns, or at lonely spots between them. Within recent years it was necessary to warn the Sheikhs of 'Ajmān, Shārjah,

244 and various vegetables are cultivated in the inland valleys. Cows, goats and other live-
133 stock are raised in the towns and the vil-
361 lages, but camels, goats and sheep are the mainstay of the Bedouin.

816 Ocher is mined on the offshore island of
471 Bu Musa, but no other mineral deposits of
135 commercial value are known to exist. The Petroleum Development (Trucial Coast) Ltd., a subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company, holds concessions for the exploitation of the oil reserves of Trucial Oman, and is conducting exploratory operations in the area. The discovery of oil would undoubtedly have a revolutionary effect upon the economy and the standards of living of the people.

361 A large majority of the inhabitants dwell in the headquarters towns of the different sheikhdoms or in adjacent fishing or agricultural villages. Most of the towns are compact, with narrow, crooked streets, darkened by projecting balconies and matting canopies put up for protection from the sun. Dibai, the largest, is a walled town with an estimated population of over 20,000. Sharja, the second in size, is a settlement of 3,000 to 15,000 which is unwalled but surrounded by a fringe of palm thatch, or *barasti*, huts.
342 The homes of the wealthy merchants are of
361 two stories with wide balconies and spacious inner courts, but those of the poor are usually simple one- or two-room huts of mud brick or palm thatch. The Bedouin live in the traditional black goat's hair tents of the nomadic tribes. They move about with their herds, following fresh pastures in the winter and congregating around desert wells in the
361 summer. A few join the fishing or the pearl-
228 ing fleets during the summer season, while their families camp in the vicinity of the towns.

144 The nutritional habits of the people vary
571 with the racial, the social and the economic backgrounds of the diverse communities. Poverty and lack of adequate transportation facilities restrict the foodstuffs available to a large percentage of the population.
262 Dates, breads prepared from wheat or mil-